
Pursuing Peace, Freedom, and Prosperity in South and Central Asia

By
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[The following are excerpts of the remarks before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C. February 16, 2006.]

Secretary Rice has made it a priority to transform the Department's structure and resources to best meet the challenges we face in the world. One of the decisions she took last year was to transfer policy responsibility for five Central Asian nations, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, from the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs to the Bureau of South Asian Affairs. I am pleased to be taking on, if confirmed, an expanded and newly improved Bureau that includes for the first time both South Asia and Central Asia. I look forward to working with the Department's talented people in Washington and in the field, both from the South Asia Bureau and those joining us from the European Bureau.

This change makes good sense, because South and Central Asia belong together. In addition to deep cultural and historic ties, major 21st Century realities such as the war on terror, outlets for energy supplies, economic cooperation and democratic opportunities tie these regions together. We will continue to emphasize the involvement of Central Asian nations with Euro-Atlantic institutions. Their links with NATO, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and with individual European nations must remain an important part of their future. We also anticipate the nations of Central Asia will strengthen their ties to the people of South Asia. Central Asia's natural partnership with Afghanistan and the tremendous potential for cross-border trade and commerce are links we should foster and support. We believe that strengthening these ties and helping to build new ones in energy, infrastructure, transportation and other areas will increase the stability of the entire region.

The success of U.S. policy in South and Central Asia is critically important to our national interests. Mr. Chairman, this is something on which, I believe, we can all agree. September 11th cemented our realization that stability in South and Central Asia was ever more vital. President Bush articulated his policy clearly by saying, "it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world." And we have been seeking just that in South and Central Asia, by promoting stability and prosperity through economic and political freedom.

Over the past five years we have taken steady strides along this path. And today we find ourselves with great opportunities to strengthen the independence and support the democratic development of these states. We are not setting out on a campaign to overturn troubled leaders or governments. Rather, we seek to champion change and reform to produce a more stable, prosperous and integrated region through the advance of freedom. We will work together with the governments and peoples of South and Central Asia, practicing what Secretary Rice has termed "transformational diplomacy." She explains that, "Transformational diplomacy is rooted in partnership; not in paternalism. In doing things with people, not for them, we seek to use America's diplomatic power to help foreign citizens better their own lives and to build their own nations and to transform their own futures."

In addition to what can be done diplomatically, the Department of State will continue to look beyond our own capabilities, to academia and to the American private sector, to make an economic contribution through our technology, markets, organization and training. We can help each of these countries fight corruption and improve education, two of the most critical elements in achieving

sustained economic growth. We will work with non-governmental organizations and others to promote modernization by opening up the doors to education, technology, information and opportunity. All these elements form a solid basis on which modern democracies and economies can flourish.

Turning policy into results is as challenging in South and Central Asia as in any other part of the world. It is a challenge I look forward to tackling with the advice and counsel of this Committee, if confirmed. Many of the world's most difficult threats are found in this region: narcotics, terrorism, corruption, weapons proliferation, human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS), failing institutions, ethnic strife, stunted economies and natural disasters. But, the people of this region also enjoy tremendous potential, in each of the countries individually as well as through regional cooperation in energy, education, transportation and trade. There is a generation of young people across the region with unprecedented dreams and, if given the chance to use their talents productively, they can create enormous benefits for themselves and for others around the world.

In each country, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, we encounter unique and challenging issues with which to deal. South and Central Asia is home to expanding populations and rising economies that are beginning to shift the balance of global power. And, one of the most obvious manifestations of this is the emergence of India on the world stage. As you know, we have embarked upon building a global strategic partnership with India. President Bush will be traveling to India in the coming weeks to continue a strong, forward-looking relationship with this rising global power. India is, of course, the world's largest democracy and will soon be the most populous nation in the world. Perhaps more importantly, India and the United States are both multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious democracies with increasingly converging interests on the world's most important issues.

If confirmed, I will work closely with other U.S. agencies and organizations to bring to fruition the initiatives President Bush and Prime Minister Singh agreed to here in Washington last July. The wide-ranging nature of these projects clearly illustrates the kind of encompassing relationship we hope to develop with India. Opening new areas to economic cooperation and concluding a civilian nuclear partnership are two of the most important areas at this moment. Beyond that, we need to look at all the areas where our international interests intersect with those of India and where we can advance our interests by partnering with India in this region and beyond. Some areas that spring to mind are agriculture, democracy building, disaster relief, education, and science and technology.

As we begin this new strategic engagement with India, we also continue America's long friendship with Pakistan. A stable and friendly relationship between these keystone nations is essential for South and Central Asia. We are encouraged by the most recent round of the composite dialogue held less than a month ago in New Delhi. Confidence-building measures, such as the opening of bus and rail links, are helping to create a constituency for peace in both nations. We will continue to encourage peace efforts between the two countries, including a resolution of the question of Kashmir.

As you know, the President will also visit Pakistan in the coming weeks to broaden our relationship with this key ally in the war on terror and make clear that we are deeply committed to helping the Pakistani people recover from the devastating earthquake of last October. President Musharraf has made the important decision to move his country away from extremism and towards a future as a modern democracy, and we fully support him in this undertaking. Beyond that, the success of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and other nations in working toward a modern, moderate, democratic future is critical to peace in this neighborhood and will have major implications throughout the world.

Afghanistan, at the center of this region, can be a bridge that links South and Central Asia, rather than a barrier that divides them. The success of the recent London Conference on Afghanistan

demonstrated that stability, democracy and economic development in Afghanistan remain top priorities for the United States and for our partners as well. The Afghanistan Compact and Interim Afghan National Development Strategy documents unveiled at the Conference map out specific security, governance and development benchmarks for the next five years; our support is vital to achieving these important goals. As we go forward, we must, of course, continue to deal decisively with the violent remnants of Al Qaeda, the Taliban and other insurgents that are still at large.

Fighting and strife exist elsewhere in this region as well. In Sri Lanka, we can now look forward to cease fire talks in Geneva next week. Our diplomats, including those at our Embassy in Colombo, will continue our work to bring resolution to this violent struggle. We also face a difficult situation in Nepal. We believe Nepal's internal struggle can only be addressed by the King taking steps to reverse the course he embarked on over a year ago, February 1, 2005, and to return to democratic government. In Bangladesh, we are looking forward to free and fair parliamentary elections next year with the full and active participation of all parties.

Central Asian nations are dealing with similar challenges of fighting terror, building sustainable growth and meeting the demands of their people for economic and political opportunity. Some leaders, such as those in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, have responded negatively and we must manage our relationships accordingly.

However, Central Asia is also a region of tremendous promise. Oil and gas production in the Caspian Sea basin, particularly in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, could make a significant contribution to global energy security. Kazakhstan may be emerging as a regional engine of economic growth and reform. Kyrgyzstan is struggling to consolidate democratic gains and keep reforms on track. Throughout the region, traditions of tolerant faith and scientific learning, which stretch back a millennium, provide a shield against imported strains of violent extremism. We seek to encourage those members of society who have begun to reform, to promote change, to open their economies, and to cooperate with their neighbors. This is the path to true stability and success, and we must help them stay on it.

Addressing the obstacles to peace, freedom and prosperity in South and Central Asia is an ambitious agenda for the United States. We welcome, of course, the contributions of the Congress, whether you are advising us here in Washington or getting out on the road to see U.S. efforts firsthand. If confirmed, I hope to collaborate closely with this Committee and look forward to your support and guidance as we pursue modernization and democratic stability in this pivotally important part of the world.